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State fund gives \$2 million to test for lead in Massachusetts public schools water



The board of the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust met in Treasurer Deborah Goldberg's office on April 26, 2016. (*SHIRA SCHOENBERG / THE REPUBLICAN*)

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BOSTON — A state government-controlled fund on Tuesday approved the use of \$2 million to test for lead in the water of Massachusetts' public schools.

"We're going to be looking across the state to make sure that we know about the condition of the drinking water in all the schools," said Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Martin Suuberg.

The new money was approved as reports have been emerging about unsafe levels of lead in several Boston public schools. [The Boston Globe reported](#) that since Sunday, the Boston public schools have identified unsafe levels of lead in water fountains at four different schools.

The city of Flint, Michigan, has received national attention due to high levels of lead contamination in its water supply.

Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, whose office oversees the Massachusetts Clean Water Trust, said after state officials heard the reports from Flint, they began wondering about the likelihood of water contamination in Massachusetts – whether in pipes or in student drinking fountains.

A tractor trailer drove thousands of bottles of water to Flint, Michigan, from Springfield.

"We want to make sure that every single community has the resources in order to find out what's going on," Goldberg said. "It's a public health issue, and it can affect (kids') brains."

The Massachusetts Clean Water Trust is a public fund that provides financing for municipal water and sewer projects using state and federal money. It was worth \$2.2 billion as of June 2015.

The board of the trust, which is chaired by Goldberg, voted unanimously on Tuesday to support the \$2 million expenditure.

The money will provide assistance for up to 1,750 schools to design and execute a water sampling program to measure amounts of lead and copper in drinking water. Doing the testing is voluntary. Suuberg said the Department of Environmental Protection will provide technical assistance to schools that need it – for example, telling schools how to do the testing, connecting them with labs and providing sampling equipment.

If lead is found, the department will work with those schools to figure out how to address the problems, such as by removing a water fountain or replacing pipes.

The House Ways and Means budget proposal for 2017, which is being debated by the House this week, includes an additional \$500,000 to provide technical assistance to cities, towns and public water suppliers to test for lead.